

Office Action Mailed 08/02/2004
Amendment Dated August 26, 2005
Examiner Wing F. Chan
Serial No. 10/716,972
Docket: TEL 001 P2 CI 5

REMARKS

In paragraph 2 of the Office Action, the Examiner objected to claims 56 and 74 as being of improper dependent form. Applicants have cancelled these claims as shown.

In paragraph 3 of the Office Action, the Examiner objected to claim 66 under 37 CFR 1.75 as being a substantial duplicate of claim 67. Applicants have changed the dependency of this claim and apologize for the inadvertent clerical error.

In paragraph 5 of the Office Action, the Examiner objected to claims 54, 58, 60, 63, 72, 76, 78 and 81 under 35 USC §112, first paragraph, as failing to comply with the written description requirement. Applicants have amended the claims as shown in order to expedite the prosecution. However, Applicants respectfully point out that the invention is not limited by these specific dimensions referred to in several of the dependent claims. Under the doctrine of claim differentiation, the independent claim 49 and the amended dependent claims require that claim 49 is broad enough to cover all the various dimensions not specifically mentioned in the dependent claims. Therefore, while Applicants agree to amend the claims as shown in order to expedite the prosecution, Applicants in no way intend to limit the scope of any pending or issued claims to the specific dimensions cited.

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As to claims 60 and 78, Applicants respectfully direct the Examiner's attention to the Figures, such as Figure 2 which clearly shows that the dimension of wall X is longer or different than the dimension Y shown in that Figure 2. Paragraph 0042 of the specification sets forth that the dimensions Y for members 32a, 32c, 32e and 32g, for example, have a width of about five feet, whereas the back wall member 32d and front wall member 32h comprise a width of about 7 feet 8 inches as indicated by the double arrow X in Fig. 2. Thus, Applicants respectfully submit that providing walls and components having different dimensions as described in the specification, which also mentions that the suites could have the same dimensions, but that they could be provided with differing dimensions (see paragraph 0046).

In view of the foregoing, Applicants believe that the claims 54, 58, 60, 63, 72, 76, 78 and 81 are now in good form and are supported by the written description and associated drawings.

In paragraph 7 of the Office Action, the Examiner rejected claims 84 – 86 under 35 USC §112, second paragraph, as being indefinite for failing to particularly point out and distinctly claim the subject matter which Applicants regard as the invention. Applicants have amended these claims as shown and believe that they are now in good form.

In paragraph 10 of the Office Action, the Examiner rejected claims 49 – 64 and 82 – 87 under 35 USC §103(a) as being unpatentable over Fields (U.S. Patent No.

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4,400,724) in view of Baloga et al. (U.S. Patent No. 5,282,341). In view of the claims as now presented and for the reasons discussed below, Applicants believe that these claims are not unpatentable over the cited references.

Fields discloses a teleconference system for N conferees, N being greater than two, includes at least two separate stations. Each station has N conferee positions, confronting a virtual conference space, and corresponding conferee positions at each station have the same relative locations about the virtual conference space. At least one conferee position at each station is adapted to be occupied by a conferee in person. Surrogate conferees, which include a video display, a video camera, and a loudspeaker, occupy each conferee position not adapted to be occupied by a conferee in person. Each video display faces one conferee and displays the image of another conferee at a corresponding position at another station; the loudspeaker reproduces the voice of the other conferee. The video camera forms image signals of the one conferee and couples these signals to the display device of a surrogate conferee at a conferee position corresponding to the position of the one conferee at the other station. The system includes a shared graphic display system. A video display device is positioned at the center of the virtual conference space and has a display screen at about the level of a table top. A target area for each conferee is scanned by an overhead video camera, and the target image signals are combined for display on the screens in the table tops at

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each station. Images from a video storage device are also combined in the composite signal. The display devices and cameras at each station are so oriented with respect to the virtual conference space that the target images from each station will appear on the screen as oriented the same as the conferee at that station.

Baloga et al. discloses a dynamic workspace module is provided for open plan spaces, and the like, and includes a compact footprint, comprising a freestanding framework supporting a three-sided partition to form an interior workspace and a portal opening for user ingress and egress. A door partition shaped to selectively close the portal opening is movably mounted on the framework. The door partition preferably has an arcuate plan shape, and is positioned adjacent one side of the portal opening, such that shifting the door partition from the fully open position to the fully closed position both increases the amount of the interior space in the workspace module, and alters the plan shape thereof for improved freedom of user movement, while alleviating any sense of user claustrophobia.

In contrast, Applicants are claiming a method for providing a conference suite in a room. The method, as covered by claim 49, includes the following steps:

providing modular components comprising a plurality of walls, at least one of said plurality of walls having a display associated therewith, said display being capable of displaying a

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substantially life-size image of at least one remote person
situated at a remote location;

assembling said modular components to define the suite
within the room; and

situating a plurality of audio-visual components in said
suite so that a video-conference may be conducted during
which said plurality of audio-visual components generate a
substantially life-size image of said at least one remote
participant on said display so that persons positioned in front of
said display will see substantially life-size image displayed on
the display.

Note that Applicants have amended claim 49 to recite that the plurality of
audio-visual components are situated in a suite so that a video conference may be
conducted during which the plurality of audio-visual components generate a life-size
image on the display so that persons positioned in front of the display will see the
substantially life-size image displayed on the display. The display device 35 of Fields
is not a display capable of creating a substantially life-size video image of, for
example, at least one person at a remote station or suite as Applicants' display
covered by claim 49.

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Moreover, the Baloga device does not disclose the use of a display other than, perhaps, a computer monitor 110, and there is no teaching in that reference that suggests that the monitor 110 is capable of displaying a life-size image.

Moreover, the claim 49 requires that a plurality of modular components are provided and those modular components are assembled to define a suite in the room. Neither Fields nor any of the references of record show a plurality of modular components that are assembled to define a suite. Indeed, Fields actually appears to teach away from such feature in that the corner walls in Fields appear to be integral, not modular, and Applicants can see no modular components or construction of modular components taught by the Fields reference.

Applicants claim 49 has also been amended to recite that a video conference may be conducted during which the plurality of audio-visual components generate a life-size image on the display such that persons positioned in front of the display can participate in a video conference. In Fields and Baloga, only a single conferee may sit in front of the monitor. Accordingly, for at least the foregoing reasons, Applicants believe that Fields does not teach of Applicants invention as now claimed.

Regarding Baloga, Baloga discloses a workspace module and is not intended for video conferencing at all. Applicants can find no teaching in either Fields or Baloga that suggests that Fields be combined with Baloga. Applicants believe that if

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Baloga was combined with Fields, it would destroy the teaching of Fields in that it would not permit the virtual space teleconference system as Fields requires.

Even if it were appropriate to combine Fields with Baloga, the resultant combination would not teach of Applicants' claim 49 as claimed for the reasons mentioned relative to claim 49. Again, each of the workspace modules shown in Baloga is intended for a single individual to perform work on a desk in front of a monitor. Likewise, Fields the references disclose a workspace at which only a single individual may work. In contrast, Applicants claim 49 recites that a conferencing station is provided by the method wherein a plurality of attendees may attend a video conference during which life-size image(s) of at least one remote participant is displayed on the display.

Finally, Applicants respectfully direct the Examiner's attention to paragraph 0046 of Applicants' specification wherein it states that the components are provided and capable of being assembled at any suitable location, such as an existing rectangular room, suite or conference area. Thus, a feature of the embodiment covered in claim 49 is that it enables the user to convert an existing room into a conference suite that is capable of displaying life-size images to a plurality of participants as now claimed.

None of the references, whether taken alone or in combination teach of the combination of steps as now recited in claim 49. For all the foregoing reasons,

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Applicants believe claim 49 is not obvious in view of Fields, when taken alone or in combination with Baloga et al., and should be allowed.

Dependent claims 50 – 64 and 82 – 87 contain limitations in addition to the limitations of claim 49, and accordingly, Applicants believe that these claims are also in condition for allowance.

Applicants also respectfully traverse the Examiner's statement that it would be obvious to provide the features of the dependent claims and that they are merely design choices. There is no teaching in the prior art that suggests a method that utilizes modular components to assemble a conferencing station utilizing the method steps as now recited in claim 49 and as further limited by the pending dependent claims.

Applicants respectfully point out that Applicants are not claiming particular dimensions, ceilings, materials and polygonal shapes alone per se, but rather, Applicants claim these features in combination with the method steps of claim 49. Applicants wish to direct the Examiner's attention to the fact that Applicants' invention facilitates providing a real-time, real-life video conference environment where participants appear generally or substantially life-size and feel as if they are in the same room. The features of a sunken ceiling, for example, or a non-rectangular shape have been found to enhance or facilitate the video-conference experience. Thus, while Applicants are not claiming these features alone per se, Applicants are

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claiming these features in combination with the other steps in the method, all of which provide a method for providing a conference suite in a room.

None of the references whether taken alone or in combination show the method as limited by the various features as claimed in the various dependent claims. For example, Applicants can find no teaching in any of the references that suggests a dropped or sunken ceiling as recited in claim 57 or of the polygonal shapes recited in claims 57 and 76 or of the octagonal shapes recited in claims 59 and 77. Indeed, the references seem to teach away from such teachings. Note, for example, that Baloga et al. requires an arcuate shape, as illustrated in Fig. 2. For all the foregoing reasons and for the reasons mentioned earlier herein relative to the rejection of claim 49, Applicants believe that these dependent claims are also in condition for allowance and such allowance is respectfully requested.

In paragraph 11 of the Office Action, the Examiner rejected claims 65 – 81 under 35 USC 103(a) as being unpatentable over Fields as modified by Baloga as applied to claim 49 and further in view of Nitta. For the reasons mentioned above relative to the rejection of claims 49 – 64 and 82 – 87, in view of the claims as now presented and also for the following reasons, Applicants believe that these claims are not obvious in view of the cited references.

Nitta discloses a network-based animated electronic meeting place is provided for business meetings, education, simulated classrooms, casual encounters,

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personal meetings, art auctions, parties and game playing, which includes a terminal for each participant on the network and local prestored animation graphics, with simulated participants in the form of animated characters or dolls being driven through sensing of each of the participants at their respective work stations, including their position, posture, gestures, audio content and optionally that persona which each individual wishes to be displayed at the animated electronic meeting place. In one embodiment, a user chooses how he represents himself on the screen through the use of a Persona or Character control. The animated electronic meeting place is provided with real time 3-D graphics renderings, showing the meeting with all of the participants including the individual participant as himself, a microphone to capture the user's speech, digital sound processing for voice localization, and position sensors to detect the participant's gestures and/or facial expressions as well as body movement. In one embodiment, the user is also provided with a view control in the form of a joy stick to zoom in or alter the perspective at which he is viewing the animated meeting. In a further embodiment, through sound localization detection as well as speech recognition circuits, stereo sound at each terminal can be steered so as to localize the sound to the person who is detected as talking.

Applicant can find no teaching in any of the references that suggests the animated electronic meeting place of Nitta be combined with Baloga et al. or Fields. Indeed, the references actually seem to teach away from such a combination

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because Fields deals with a virtual place teleconference where a single user is positioned and views a remote user on a display 35. If the virtual space teleconference system of Fields is combined with Nitta, it would destroy the teaching of Fields in that it would suggest that the participants in Fields become animated in an electronic meeting place as required by Nitta. Alternatively, it would seem that the features of Fields, if combined with Nitta, would destroy the teachings of Nitta in that it would eliminate the need for the animation. Note that the terminal 30 in Nitta is utilized to display an image of the animated electronic meeting place, not of a remote participant. Consequently, if the references were combined as suggested, the devices of Fields or Nitta may become inoperable.

As to claims directed to a predetermined sensory setting, such as education, business, etc., Applicants are not claiming education, business, etc. alone per se, but rather are claiming a method for providing a suite in a room wherein the suite defines the setting. Thus, Applicants are claiming these features in combination with the other elements and limitations of the associated base claim 49 and any intervening claims. The workspaces in the references do not define a conferencing suite that defines the setting. None of the references teach of the base claim 49 and therefore cannot teach of the dependent claims.

As to the claims directed to providing decorations, again, Applicants respectfully submit that the decorations facilitate enhancing the video conference

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experience so that participants at the station feel as if they are in the same room and face-to-face and otherwise provide aesthetically pleasing environments which facilitate providing the allusion that the participants are in the same room. The features recited in the dependent claims are not being claimed alone per se, but rather in combination with the elements of the base claim. While Applicants concede that it is common knowledge for a room to have a ceiling, it is not common knowledge for a room to have a video conference suite of a modular construction that has a ceiling or even a sunken ceiling. In this regard, note that none of the references disclose the use of a sunken ceiling, and in fact, it would appear that Fields could not use a sunken ceiling because of the camera 82 (Fig. 9).

For all the foregoing reasons, Applicants believe that these dependent claims are not obvious in view of the references, when viewed alone or in combination, and should be allowed.

If the Examiner feels that this amendment does not place the case in condition for allowance, then Applicants respectfully request an interview with the Examiner prior to the issuance of any further Office Action.

Applicants are filing concurrently herewith a Petition For Revival Of An Application For Patent Abandoned Unintentionally Under 37 CFR 1.137(b) along with a request for a three-month extension of time.

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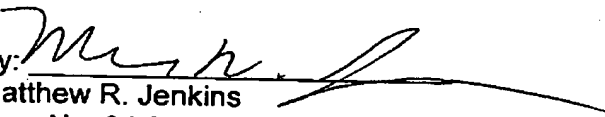
The Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge any additional fees under 37 C.F.R. 1.16 and 1.17 which may be required by this paper, or to credit any overpayment, to Deposit Account No. 50-1287. Applicants hereby provide a general request for any extension of time which may be required at any time during the prosecution of the application. The Commissioner is also authorized to charge any fees which have not been previously paid for by check and which are required during the prosecution of this application to Deposit Account No. 50-1287. (Should Deposit Account No. 50-1287 be deficient, please charge any further deficiencies to Deposit Account No. 10-0220).

Applicants invite the Examiner to contact the undersigned via telephone with any questions or comments regarding this case.

Reconsideration and favorable action are respectfully requested.

Respectfully Submitted,

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